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New York

President: Ms. Al-Khalifa ..... (Bahrain)

The meeting was called to order at 10.15 a.m.

Agenda item 108 (*continued*)

Cooperation between the United Nations and regional and other organizations

(g) Cooperation between the United Nations and the Council of Europe: draft resolution (A/61/L.14)

(i) Cooperation between the United Nations and the Economic Cooperation Organization: draft resolution (A/61/L.8)

(m) Cooperation between the United Nations and the League of Arab States: draft resolution (A/61/L.17)

The President: Members will recall that the Assembly held its debate on sub-items (a) through (t) of agenda item 108 at its 38th and 39th plenary meetings, on 22 October.

I call on the representative of the Russian Federation to introduce draft resolution A/61/L.14.

Mr. Churkin (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): As the Chairman of the Ministerial Committee of the Council of Europe, Russia has the honour to present a draft resolution entitled "Cooperation between the United Nations and the Council of Europe", contained in document A/61/L.14, under agenda item 108 (g).

It is also my pleasure to announce that Austria, Azerbaijan, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Canada, Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Kazakhstan, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Montenegro, Norway, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia have joined the list of sponsors.

I wish to thank all the sponsors of the draft resolution for their contributions and strong support, as well as those delegations that participated so constructively in its harmonization.

The draft resolution on cooperation between the United Nations and Council of Europe fully meets the aspirations of both organizations to closer cooperation in the field of peace and security, the defence of human rights, the struggle against terrorism, conflict prevention and post-conflict peacebuilding. Its adoption will no doubt promote the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals and the principle strategic goals adopted at the Third Summit of the Council of Europe, held in Warsaw, on the basis of democracy, human rights, the rule of law, cultural diversity and social solidarity.

I call on all States members of the General Assembly to pursue the partnership relations that have developed between the two organizations and to consolidate the shared work of the United Nations and regional organizations.

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In conclusion, I express my sincere gratitude to all States members of the Council of Europe for their spirit of cooperation during our presidency. We hope that the draft resolution on cooperation between the United Nations and the Council of Europe will be adopted by the General Assembly without a vote and by consensus.

The President: The Assembly will now take decisions on the draft resolutions contained in documents A/61/L.8, A/61/L.14 and A/61/L.17.

We turn first to draft resolution A/61/L.8, entitled "Cooperation between the United Nations and the Economic Cooperation Organization".

May I take it that the Assembly decides to adopt draft resolution A/61/L.8?

Draft resolution A/61/L.8 was adopted (resolution 61/12).

The President: We shall now turn to draft resolution A/61/L.14, entitled "Cooperation between the United Nations and the Council of Europe".

Cyprus has joined the list of sponsors of draft resolution A/61/L.14.

May I take it that the Assembly decides to adopt draft resolution A/61/L.14?

Draft resolution A/61/L.14 was adopted (resolution 61/13).

The President: We shall now turn to draft resolution A/61/L.17 entitled "Cooperation between the United Nations and the League of Arab States".

May I take it that the Assembly decides to adopt draft resolution A/61/L.17?

Draft resolution A/61/L.17 was adopted (resolution 61/14).

The President: May I take it that it is the wish of the General Assembly to conclude its consideration of sub-items (g), (i) and (m) of agenda item 108?

It was so decided.

Agenda item 69

Strengthening of the coordination of humanitarian and disaster relief assistance of the United Nations, including special economic assistance: reports of the Secretary-General (A/61/79 and A/61/463)

(a) Strengthening of the coordination of emergency humanitarian assistance of the United Nations

Letter by the Secretary-General (A/61/550)

Reports of the Secretary-General (A/61/85, A/61/87 and A/61/314)

(d) Assistance to the Palestinian people: report of the Secretary-General (A/61/80)

The President: So far this year, the world has been spared major natural disasters and there have been fresh opportunities for peace, be they in Uganda, the Democratic Republic of the Congo or Timor-Leste. As a result of those favourable circumstances, there has been a reduction in the number of events requiring humanitarian assistance this year.

That pause gives the United Nations opportunity to focus preparedness activities in several regions prone to natural events and to consolidate the humanitarian reforms initiated during the World Summit in September 2005. That reform programme has already been successful.

The Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF), established by the General Assembly last December, has delivered time-critical responses, saving lives in 25 countries. It was particularly effective during the Lebanon crisis this summer, providing immediate funding for the transportation of humanitarian goods across Lebanon when no funds would have been available otherwise. It will be important to continue to improve CERF and to ensure that it is fully funded in future.

Last week, the Secretary-General's High-level Panel on United Nations System-wide Coherence noted that the United Nations has a unique and leading role to play in humanitarian disasters and emergencies. The Panel also recommended various measures to enhance that role further, building on the ongoing reforms.

The humanitarian community continues to face a number of challenges in various areas.

First, there are a number of ongoing emergencies that need to be addressed urgently, such as the drought in the Horn of Africa, which is affecting 15 million people in five countries. Drought cycles have increasingly rendered populations more vulnerable to minor shocks that can disrupt livelihoods, trigger famine and even cause conflicts.

Secondly, access to populations in need of humanitarian assistance remains an issue of great concern. In the Darfur region of the Sudan, 3.6 million people are in need of relief supplies. However, access for humanitarian personnel is restricted due to growing insecurity. Since 30 June this year, 12 humanitarian workers have been killed in Darfur. A substantial grant from the Central Emergency Response Fund has allowed helicopter access to remote areas, but only for a three-month period. That is not a sustainable solution.

Thirdly, gender-based violence is also an issue of concern to the humanitarian community. Sexual violence is only one form of gender-based violence; forced conscription and the recruitment of boys into military ranks are others. Member States have the prime responsibility for preventing those violations by putting in place measures to prosecute perpetrators and by establishing structures to take care of their victims.

Finally, today's debate also covers sub-item (d) on assistance to the Palestinian people. Significant long-term financial support from the international community is needed in order to avoid a further degradation of the humanitarian and economic situation in Palestine. Due to the ongoing political uncertainty and economic hardship, United Nations agencies have directed most of their activities towards immediate emergency assistance.

As we conduct our deliberations today, let us keep in mind all the vulnerable people around the world in need of humanitarian assistance. Our common efforts to strengthen the coordination of the humanitarian and emergency response system of the United Nations should seek to reduce the suffering and improve the chances of survival in times of emergencies. We must not fail those who depend on the United Nations as their final hope.

Ms. Lintonen (Finland): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union (EU). The acceding countries Bulgaria and Romania; the candidate countries Turkey, Croatia and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia; the countries of the Stabilisation and Association Process and potential candidates Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro and Serbia; as well as Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova align themselves with this declaration.

The European Union wishes to thank the Secretary-General for the reports provided for this session. At the outset, the European Union wishes to express its condolences to respective countries in view of recent humanitarian emergencies resulting in lost lives and livelihoods. We wish to pay tribute to the courageous humanitarian field workers and express our sorrow over the personnel who have lost their lives in bringing assistance to those in need.

The European Union is committed to advancing the humanitarian reform agenda to promote a more predictable and effective humanitarian response, including the development of a stronger standing response capacity, improved coordination capacity and more predictable funding. The Union wishes to reaffirm the United Nations leadership role in humanitarian action and welcomes the improvements in humanitarian response now under way as a result of the reform efforts. However, joint and decisive action is needed to further improve humanitarian action and to prevent crises from the outset. The European Union is especially alarmed at the deteriorating humanitarian and security situation in the Sudan, particularly in Darfur, and in Sri Lanka.

The humanitarian principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence remain the cornerstones for the provision of humanitarian assistance, which has to be needs-based. That is what makes humanitarian assistance unique and is something we as humanitarian actors are committed to. The European Union is an active proponent of international humanitarian law, human rights and refugee law, including the protection of civilians and humanitarian personnel.

The primary responsibility for the protection of civilians rests with national Governments. In that regard, we also recall the World Summit outcome of last year on the responsibility to protect. Based on that responsibility of national Governments, the European Union wishes to strongly urge all Governments and parties to conflict to ensure safe and unimpeded access to humanitarian assistance and the protection of affected populations. The protection and security of staff, both in the field and at Headquarters, is of utmost importance. Attacks on humanitarian personnel cannot, under any circumstances, be tolerated. The European Union strongly condemns all threats and acts of violence against humanitarian personnel and United Nations and associated personnel.

The EU calls for an immediate end to all violence, including sexual and gender-based violence. Effective measures for prevention, as well as for the protection of and support for victims of gender-based violence, must be put in place by Member States. That should include the development and effective implementation of necessary legislation, standards, policies and resources at all levels.

Bringing perpetrators to justice is vital. The EU affirms once again the need to hold accountable those responsible for illegal acts and strongly urges all States to take stronger action to end impunity, including by ensuring that any such acts committed on their territory be investigated fully and that those responsible be brought to justice without delay. The EU strongly supports the International Criminal Court (ICC) and calls upon all States that are not yet party to the Rome Statute of the ICC to ratify or accede to it without delay.

The EU finds it encouraging that the number of refugees throughout the world continues to decrease, but recognizes that refugee situations have become more complex and protracted and that the number of internally displaced persons has grown. The protection of and assistance to internally displaced persons should be comprehensively strengthened. The EU welcomes the new role of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees as a cluster lead in the clusters of camp coordination and camp management, protection and emergency shelter in conflict-related internal displacement situations, and looks forward to achieving further clarity in the system-wide response to the issue of internally displaced persons.

The humanitarian coordinator/resident coordinator system is key to a successfully coordinated humanitarian response at the country level. The EU welcomes the improvements already made, including reinforced training programmes and the establishment of a pool of humanitarian coordinators. The recently launched cluster leadership approach is equally important, as it strengthens coordination by more systematically identifying roles and responsibilities within the United Nations system. That facilitates strengthened leadership, coordination, strategic planning and the identification of needs and response gaps. The cluster approach should be an inclusive process involving all humanitarian actors in order to increase efficiency at the field level. The EU looks forward to further efforts in that regard, including the strengthening of surge capacity.

The EU welcomes efforts to develop and improve stand-by capacities for humanitarian assistance. In our view, that could include more permanent arrangements with member States and with regional organizations. Local capacity is particularly important in sudden-onset disasters.

Recognizing the benefits of effective engagement and coordination of relevant humanitarian actors, the EU continues to support and further encourages strong partnerships with local actors, non-governmental organizations and civil society, including the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement.

Humanitarian perspectives should be taken into account in political, security and peacekeeping operations, bearing in mind the importance of preserving humanitarian space in integrated missions. The EU believes that the Peacebuilding Commission can further contribute to a coordinated response of the United Nations to States emerging from conflict. The first country-specific meetings held in October on Sierra Leone and Burundi represented an encouraging start.

The predictability, timeliness and equity of humanitarian funding needs to be improved, as some emergencies remain chronically underfunded or even neglected. In that regard, the establishment of the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) constitutes a major improvement. The report of the Secretary-General indicates that CERF has contributed to the timeliness of response and towards improved coordination, in particular at the country level. It has also contributed to a more equitable distribution of aid, addressing core needs in underfunded emergencies, particularly in Africa. The States members of the EU have so far contributed over $180 million to CERF, and additional pledges have been made.

The European Union remains committed to the Good Humanitarian Donorship initiative and encourages the efforts of all donors to implement the principles rigorously. Effective coordination among donors themselves would contribute to a more coherent response and to a decrease in unnecessary and overlapping actions by donors.

The EU recalls the need for reliable, accurate and timely needs assessments and multi-agency lessons-

learned processes. Efforts to further improve the quality and inclusiveness of the consolidated appeals process should continue.

Natural disasters are on the increase and have a debilitating impact, particularly on low-income populations. We fully agree with the Secretary-General that prevention is better than cure. Additional investments are needed for disaster risk reduction to proceed from merely reacting to disasters with relief efforts to actually building resilience. Donors and hazard-affected countries need to invest more in disaster mitigation and preparedness measures, including, in particular, national-level and local capabilities, which includes the idea of saving not only lives, but also assets and livelihoods. Disaster risk reduction efforts should be integrated into sustainable development and poverty reduction strategies. Close cooperation of States Members of the United Nations, in particular the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction, as well as the international financial institutions, is crucial in building long-term resilience and implementing the priorities set out in the Hyogo Framework for Action.

It is a great challenge to find ways to turn the tragic events of natural disasters and conflicts into an opportunity for long-term development and settlement. The United Nations system needs to give more attention to bridging the existing gaps in addressing situations of transition from relief to development. The European Union welcomes the designation of UNDP to lead in the early recovery cluster within the cluster leadership framework.

Successful transition can be achieved only if there is a strong commitment to ensuring that all members of society are able to play an active role in the process. Achieving sustainable development will not be possible without the full involvement of women. The EU wishes to underline that gender and age should be included in strategies for emergency response and reconstruction programmes as cross-cutting issues from the earliest stages.

Finally, the EU wishes to pay tribute to Mr. Jan Egeland for his untiring efforts in recent years in the humanitarian area. We would like to take this opportunity to reaffirm our strong support for him and his team at the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs in their important work. The European Union remains committed to contributing towards a more coordinated and effective humanitarian response.

Ms. Rouse (Grenada): I have the honour to speak, on behalf of the States members of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) that are Members of the United Nations, on agenda item 69, "Strengthening of the coordination of humanitarian and disaster relief assistance of the United Nations, including special economic assistance", and its sub-item (a), "Strengthening of the coordination of emergency humanitarian assistance of the United Nations".

We welcome the Secretary-General's reports on those agenda items and wish to take this opportunity to congratulate the Emergency Relief Coordinator and his staff for their hard work and dedication in facing the challenges presented during this past year.

Reports of an upward trend in disasters, with vastly devastating effects, and the probability that this trend will continue as vulnerabilities increase are disconcerting. Even more worrisome in that context to the CARICOM member States is the reported growing frequency and severity of hydro-meteorological hazards.

Addressing the complexities of disasters and ending the cycles of vulnerabilities necessitate an integrated approach to disaster management that would include, as indicated in the Secretary-General's report contained in document A/61/85, disaster planning and preparedness, sustained assistance for post-disaster recovery and reconstruction, and the prioritization of risk reduction as a matter of urgency.

Towards that end, the World Summit Outcome set forth three broad areas to improve the United Nations humanitarian system. Without prejudice to the importance of progress at an even pace in all three areas, CARICOM has particular interest in the improvement of facilities for rapid access to funds in the initial phases of a humanitarian emergency and for ensuring equitable response to neglected emergencies or otherwise chronically underfunded emergencies.

As small island developing States with particular vulnerabilities to hurricanes, floods and earthquakes, our development itself is dependent upon the frequency and magnitude of such weather events. Yet international response to disasters that struck Grenada,

Guyana, Haiti and Jamaica, to name a few, in the more recent past has been inadequate. It was therefore in that context that we welcomed the launching of the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) on 9 March as a means to ensure a more predictable and timely response to humanitarian emergencies and recognized the innovative grant element in the improved Fund.

CARICOM is pleased with the application of the Fund during the first six months since its launching. We note in particular the immediate disbursement of funds based on appeals for rapid response for situations in Africa, as well as the allocation of funds in underfunded crises.

In order to ensure that CERF remains an effective funding tool, its funds must be replenished. In that regard, CARICOM member States urge the transformation of pledges into firm funding commitments.

Secondly, it is important to recall the purpose of CERF as a mechanism of last resort and the complementary role it plays to humanitarian appeals mechanisms and emergency funds by individual agencies. In that regard, CARICOM notes that the Fund has been able to complement other humanitarian funding arrangements, especially with assistance to the World Food Programme, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the International Organization for Migration, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, the United Nations Children's Fund, the World Health Organization, the United Nations Population Fund and other entities in filling unmet needs and supporting life-saving programmes. Consequently, in light of the role of the Fund, as stated in the report of the Secretary-General, donor funding to CERF must be additional to donors' response to emergency funds and to appeals from agencies.

CARICOM member States take this opportunity to recall the important function of the Advisory Group, as established pursuant to resolution 60/124, to provide advice to the Secretary-General on the use and impact of the Central Emergency Response Fund. We commend the Advisory Group's work thus far and note its report of 12 October 2006 on the use and management of CERF. CARICOM also endorses the Advisory Group's recommendation that Member States make every effort to achieve as soon as possible the $500-million target established by the General Assembly and welcomes the advocacy role the Group intends to undertake for the early attainment of that target. CARICOM further encourages the highest level of participation, as possible, at the forthcoming donor conference for the Fund on 7 December.

In 1991, CARICOM member States established a disaster management programme to coordinate disaster response and management at the regional level. The functions of the Caribbean Disaster Emergency Response Agency (CDERA) include providing information to interested organizations on disasters affecting the region; disaster mitigation; establishing and maintaining, on a sustainable basis, adequate disaster response capabilities among CARICOM States; and mobilizing and coordinating disaster relief.

CARICOM member States appreciate the ongoing support of the international community with respect to disaster mitigation. We make particular mention of the recent donation by the Government of Turkey that regional initiative in the sum of $400,000 to CDERA for the support of the wider Comprehensive Disaster Management (CDM) programme in the region. That donation was timely, as it brought flexibility to supporting gaps in CDM resources and will be utilized to support country programming, among other activities.

We also welcome the conclusion of a Financing Agreement for Institutional Support and Capacity Building for Disaster Management in the Caribbean between the European Union and the Caribbean Forum. The €3.4 million project is intended to strengthen and increase CDERA'S effectiveness and to improve its coordination within the region; review and revise existing disaster management legislation with a view to establishing appropriate legislation where needed; set up and support national awareness and management campaigns in collaboration with government agencies, non-governmental organizations and other parties working in that area; and increase the use of information and communications technologies for emergency planning, thereby making the comprehensive disaster management programme more effective and its capacity enhanced for management and related teaching and research through exchange studies and other research in that field.

CARICOM believes that the assistance rendered by the Financing Agreement will doubtless serve not only to strengthen CDERA, and by extension the

human resource capacity of the region, but even more to underwrite our economic and social development.

CARICOM is well aware that the future success of the Fund is dependent on the will and support of Member States in increasing their contributions in order to meet the three-year target of $500 million endorsed by the General Assembly. As the theme for the sixty-first session — "Implementing a global partnership for development" — reminds us, we must all work together and support each other in all areas possible.

Mr. Nikitov (Ukraine): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the States members of the Organization for Democracy and Economic Development (GUAM), namely, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine.

At the outset, we would like to thank the Secretariat for the report submitted under agenda item 69.

The past year was marked by a continuing rise in the number of large-scale disasters and affected populations. Recent humanitarian crises have demonstrated the overall capability of the humanitarian community to launch a massive response when called upon. However, it is quite obvious that the quality of such a response still needs further improvement. Humanitarian response does not always meet the basic needs of affected populations in a timely way; it varies considerably from crisis to crisis, and current capacity levels are not always sufficient to meet the demands of major emergencies occurring at the same time. While some of the factors affecting response are specific to individual crises, some of the key challenges seem to be systematic in nature.

The GUAM States believe that the further strengthening of the current international humanitarian response system and improving the coordination of humanitarian assistance, sustained and unhindered humanitarian access, as well as flexible and predictable emergency funding, are key issues.

At the national level, institutional capacity-building and support for national efforts in strengthening humanitarian response capacities, including through sharing best practices and expertise and establishing national contingency plans, are critical for proper disaster preparedness and response.

Better coordination by the United Nations of international efforts on the ground is needed in order to avoid unnecessary duplication and to increase the efficiency of the Organization. The humanitarian skills and capabilities of both humanitarian and resident coordinators in countries at risk of natural disasters and humanitarian emergencies should be further developed and upgraded.

Humanitarian assistance and funding should not be limited to providing immediate response to crises, but must take into account long-term needs in the transition phase. The capacity gaps of the United Nations coordination mechanisms in the transition space have to be adequately addressed to ensure efficient response to transition needs.

We therefore welcome the continued efforts of the United Nations humanitarian system to further improve and strengthen the coordination of humanitarian response. We believe that the cluster leadership approach is a step forward towards improving predictability, accountability and the effectiveness of humanitarian response. The timely and predictable funding of cluster-related activities at both the global and country levels is critical to the effectiveness of that approach.

Looking back at the developments of the past year, one should recognize the persistence of serious humanitarian challenges. Restricted humanitarian access, non-compliance with international humanitarian law and humanitarian principles, and continued attacks on humanitarian workers can be mentioned once again in that regard, but it is more disturbing that such humanitarian concerns as the spread of HIV/AIDS, sexual exploitation and the abuse of civilians in humanitarian crises have loomed large.

The GUAM States are concerned by the alarming spread of the HIV/AIDS epidemic in humanitarian crises, which further amplifies the suffering of civilian populations. It is particularly discouraging that, coupled with famine and natural disasters, HIV/AIDS is driving ever-larger sectors of nations towards destitution. Efforts to address the problem could be more successful if reinforced by concrete action on the part of Member States, particularly through the development of national strategies that address the spread of HIV among humanitarian workers and international peacekeepers.

Speaking on the transition from relief to development, we cannot but refer to the consequences of the Chernobyl disaster. Now, 20 years after the tragic accident, the impact of that catastrophe on the lives of millions of affected people continues to pose an enormous challenge in the region.

We attach special significance to the role of the United Nations in strengthening the international response to the consequences of the Chernobyl catastrophe. We thank the delegations that took part in a special plenary meeting in spring this year in the framework of the sixtieth session of the General Assembly to honour the victims of the Chernobyl disaster and to raise public awareness about the long-term consequences of the Chernobyl catastrophe. We appreciate the contribution made by all Member States and organizations of the United Nations system, as well as representatives of civil society, the private sector and the donor community to the development of cooperation to mitigate and minimize the consequences of the Chernobyl disaster.

Mr. Al-Shamsi (United Arab Emirates) (*spoke in Arabic*): It gives me pleasure to extend to you, Madam, and to the members of the Bureau, sincere gratitude and appreciation for your efforts in guiding our work at this meeting. I would also like to express our appreciation to the Secretary-General for his important reports under this agenda item.

The loss of life and the destruction caused by natural disasters and conflicts during the past few years, in both developing and developed countries, and the universally sympathetic response and provision of assistance to those countries, confirm, beyond any doubt, the need for effective international solidarity and cooperation in confronting the aftermath of disasters and containing their destructive effects, as well as in alleviating the suffering of the affected persons and assisting them in resuming their normal lives as soon as possible. In this context, the United Arab Emirates emphasizes the central role of the United Nations in the strengthening of the coordination of long-term humanitarian and disaster relief assistance. We greatly value the efforts made by the Organization and all those working in the field of humanitarian assistance and relief.

In this regard, we would like to reaffirm the importance of implementing the recommendations of international conferences on the coordination of international efforts to elaborate an international strategy to deal with natural disasters at every stage, from early warning to relief assistance, rebuilding and development, as well as to adopt appropriate measures to assist poor countries in building their national capacities to deal with natural disasters and the consequences of war.

The United Arab Emirates is one of the largest contributors in the field of humanitarian and relief assistance in emergencies, as well as in terms of long-term assistance in all areas of the world. It provides assistance through donations, in cash and in kind, most of which goes to the affected countries through direct bilateral arrangements between them and the United Arab Emirates. The United Arab Emirates also fulfils its financial commitments to the United Nations bodies concerned with humanitarian and relief assistance and development activities, such as the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, the Office of the High Commissioner for Refugees, the International Committee of the Red Cross and other development bodies of the Organization. The United Arab Emirates has pledged to give $1.038 million to those bodies in 2007.

In May 2006, in order to support the coordination of international efforts in this field, the United Arab Emirates joined the donor partnership group and the donor support group within the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, whose membership comprises the most active donor countries in the humanitarian field.

In support of international efforts to respond to natural disasters, the United Arab Emirates established Dubai Humanitarian City to provide facilities and integrated services to national and international humanitarian organizations. It has always attached great importance to enhancing the capabilities of affected countries to respond effectively to disasters and to supporting their efforts, including research, aimed at enhancing their ability to predict natural disasters and contain their consequences, while strengthening the infrastructure of those countries.

To reduce the harmful effects of climate change on the environment around the world, the United Arab Emirates has ratified the Kyoto Protocol to limit global warming and greenhouse emissions. We have also ratified the Vienna Convention for the Protection of the Ozone Layer and the Montreal Protocol on Substances

That Deplete the Ozone Layer. The United Arab Emirates has adopted a national strategy to implement those instruments.

During the period 2004-2006, the Government of the United Arab Emirates, working with the Emirates Red Crescent Authority, contributed about $775 million to support and enhance international efforts to assist tsunami victims, as well as the victims of the earthquake that hit Pakistan and southern India, Hurricane Katrina, which struck the United States of America, and the earthquake that took place in Indonesia in May, 2006. Part of those donations were also provided for the reconstruction of countries affected by conflict, including Afghanistan, Iraq, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Lebanon. By September 2006, the Red Crescent Authority of the United Arab Emirates had spent more than $275 million on humanitarian and relief projects in 100 countries throughout the world. In September 2006, the United Arab Emirates pledged to resume the Emirates Solidarity Project for demining in southern Lebanon.

The United Arab Emirates attaches great importance to supporting and assisting the Palestinian people and Government and to alleviating the suffering of the people during the humanitarian crisis caused by the brutal assault on them by the Israeli occupation forces. United Arab Emirates donations to the Palestinians in the period 2000-2005 amounted to $829 million. Those funds are in addition to other humanitarian assistance provided through the relevant United Nations agencies to meet their immediate livelihood needs and to rebuild the cities destroyed by the savage Israeli assault.

Furthermore, in July 2005 the United Arab Emirates allocated $100 million to construct the city of Khalifa bin Zayed on the ruins of the evacuated Israeli settlements in Gaza. Relief and services projects in Palestine carried out by the United Arab Emirates Red Crescent Authority have exceeded $122 millions dollars, in addition to other assistance in kind.

The United Arab Emirates is deeply concerned about the deteriorating humanitarian conditions of the Palestinian people in the occupied Palestinian territories resulting from the economic, political and military blockade imposed by the Israeli occupying forces — a blockade that has denied people access to humanitarian and economic assistance. The massacres, the collective punishment, the incursions into cities and villages, the confiscation of farmland and water resources, the destruction of property and the construction of the expansionist separation wall, have all led to the death and disabling of thousands of civilians and to the internal displacement of thousands more. Huge losses have been inflicted on the economy, as a result of which more than two thirds of the people now live below the poverty line, while half of the children suffer from diseases related to malnutrition. This situation is in danger of developing into a serious humanitarian disaster.

We call upon the United Nations, especially the Security Council, to fulfil its responsibility for the protection of the Palestinian people and to compel Israel, the occupying Power, to stop its acts of aggression and its other crimes immediately; to lift its blockade of the occupied Palestinian territories; and to halt the construction of the illegal expansionist wall and dismantle those parts that have already been constructed, in compliance with the international legality and the principles of international humanitarian law. Further, it should resume the peace negotiations on the basis of the relevant international resolutions and the Arab Peace Initiative adopted at the Beirut Summit.

Mr. Wali (Nigeria), Vice-President, took the Chair.

We further emphasize the need for UNRWA to continue to discharge its responsibility to provide services to refugees in all of its areas of operation and the need to continue financial support for the regular and urgent activities and programmes of the Agency. We further urge donor countries to resume their assistance to the Palestinian people and Government in order to alleviate their suffering until an end is put to the Israeli occupation of their land and until the establishment of an independent State of Palestine, with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital.

Mr. Sen (India): We would like to thank the Secretary-General for the reports that have been prepared for the discussions under this agenda item. We also thank the Under-Secretary-General, Mr. Jan Egeland, for the introduction of the reports. We appreciate the candid approach adopted in the report that identifies areas for improvement even as it describes positive developments.

The Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) was launched in March this year to address the concern

regarding the allocation and availability of resources for humanitarian assistance and to enable the United Nations to provide timely humanitarian assistance evenly across emergencies. India strongly supported that initiative out of its conviction that through this reform measure, the United Nations would be better positioned to assist developing countries in their hour of need in the aftermath of a disaster. India demonstrated solidarity with the international efforts aimed at addressing the needs of developing countries for emergency humanitarian assistance through pledging a contribution of $2 million to CERF at its launch in New York, half of which has already been disbursed.

As promised by the Secretary-General, detailed information on the use of CERF has been provided to Member States. The report indicates that CERF has made good progress towards its objectives of promoting early action and response to reduce loss of life and of enhancing United Nations humanitarian assistance to time-critical needs in the aftermath of disasters and in underfunded emergencies.

We note that the Emergency Relief Coordinator has focused on the need for the timely allocation and disbursement of CERF funds. We also note with satisfaction that despite the fact that its implementation is at an early stage, CERF has enabled humanitarian assistance to be made available within 72 hours. We encourage the Emergency Relief Coordinator to continue efforts to address administrative delays and streamline application processes. While appreciating the need for completing the requisite paperwork prior to disbursement of funds, there is a need for balance so that developing countries are not burdened by excessive paper work at a time when the capacities of their authorities are stretched in coping with the aftermath of a disaster.

We have perused with interest the note on the meeting of the CERF Advisory Group held in Geneva in October 2006. We note that the Advisory Group made some substantive recommendations for further improvements, such as through the consideration of an umbrella letter of understanding, delegation of authority and development of additional standardized templates. The Advisory Group also emphasized the importance of a field-driven approach. We would suggest that the recommendations of the Advisory Group, including those related to the decision to undertake field visits to implementation sites, be examined by the Emergency Relief Coordinator and his recommendations brought to the Member States for their consideration.

India is committed to the Guiding Principles for the provision of humanitarian assistance contained in the annex to resolution 46/182. We believe that humanitarian assistance must be provided in accordance with the principles of humanity, neutrality and impartiality. We recall that the Guiding Principles enjoin that sovereignty, territorial integrity and national unity of States must be fully respected and that humanitarian assistance should be provided with the consent of the affected country and in principle on the basis of an appeal by the affected country.

In that context, we are concerned at the recommendations of the report on humanitarian access, which are not in line with the scope of the Guiding Principles of resolution 46/182. We have been encouraged by the achievements that the United Nations has made through the establishment of CERF. Those gains can be consolidated and built upon by retaining the neutrality and non-political character of humanitarian assistance. The International Committee of the Red Cross commentary on the Fourth Geneva Convention describes "humanitarian" as "being concerned with the condition of man considered solely as a human being, regardless of his value as a military, political, professional or other unit" and "not ... affected by any political or military consideration".

Country ownership is crucial, and this should be genuine and not disingenuous. Humanitarian assistance is aimed at relieving immediate suffering only, and therefore ensuring all of this should be relatively easier.

The report appears to project the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement as standards for countries to follow. The Guiding Principles were developed on the basis of experience of massive displacement in war and conflict situations. The Secretary-General's reports in the past have acknowledged that adequately assisting internally displaced persons (IDPs) requires knowledge and understanding of the specific context in which the disaster occurred. India believes that well-functioning and stable Governments with strong national and legal institutions can and do take care of their IDPs. They are also best placed to understand their own national context and legislative requirements.

The report recommends the strengthening of local, national and regional capacities for preparing for and responding to humanitarian emergencies. India has strengthened its disaster preparedness and response capacity over the past several years. The aftermath of the tsunami disaster further spurred those efforts. The Disaster Management Act 2005 envisages a holistic and comprehensive approach to disaster management with a greater focus on prevention, mitigation, preparedness and capacity-building. The National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA), chaired by the Prime Minister, has been created with a provision for similar organizational arrangements at the state and district levels. Some states have already taken action in that regard.

The NDMA has formed core groups to formulate strategy and guidelines to mitigate the effects of disasters such as earthquakes, cyclones, floods, and chemical and industrial disasters. The Disaster Risk Management Project is being implemented jointly with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in 169 districts with high vulnerability to natural disasters and includes the important elements of community preparedness and community capacity-building. The process of the creation of disaster-response teams for providing a specialized response has started, and equipment and training needs are being considered.

The political economy of humanitarian assistance is, of course, broader, touching on ethical issues such as the principle of negative action, which states that not doing enough and letting death and disaster happen is as bad as actually inflicting death and disaster, and economic development, because it is the poor that often bear the brunt of natural disasters, science and technology.

In India, satellite-based early-warning systems have greatly mitigated, if not eliminated, the consequences of cyclones, and we hope they will do the same in connection with any future tsunamis. We have always been prepared to share that technology with developing countries.

We note that, as desired by Member States, the report recommends other areas for improving the delivery of United Nations humanitarian assistance, including through the improvement of United Nations coordination activities at the field level. The report cites the cluster leadership approach as an effort in that direction and recommends that at the country level, cluster lead agencies should collaborate closely with Government partners. We believe that there is a need for further information on and an understanding of this approach, especially from the perspective of the receiving countries where this approach has been implemented so far.

In keeping with the basic principles that guide the work of the United Nations at the country level, we recommend that this approach be implemented at the country level with the consent and under the leadership of the national Government of the affected State. An evaluation of the effectiveness of the cluster approach in enhancing coordination among United Nations agencies, taking into account the financial costs incurred in implementing the approach and incorporating the inputs of the affected States, should be presented to Member States. We agree with the Secretary-General that the cluster approach can be considered only as a first step and not as a solution.

We are happy that the report has devoted considerable attention to the issue of chronically underfunded emergencies. We note that the report recommends the development of indicators for humanitarian assistance. We recommend that the issue be discussed carefully at the intergovernmental level, in the first instance.

Mr. Shinyo (Japan): First of all, Japan welcomes the ongoing efforts to achieve reform in the humanitarian sector, which will make for more effective provision of humanitarian assistance and protection of those in need. We commend Under-Secretary-General Egeland and the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) for the work they have done, together with other humanitarian partners, to improve the predictability and effectiveness of humanitarian activities. Japan, together with the rest of the international community, will continue to do its utmost to promote humanitarian reform.

We welcome the establishment of the Central Emergency Response Fund and also the positive and concrete results of its efforts to realize the objectives described in the resolution of the General Assembly last year. Enlargement of the donor base is another positive outcome since the establishment of the Fund. For example, the Government of Hyogo prefecture in Japan has committed itself to contributing 100 million

yen to the Fund. Outreach to local governments and civil society leads to enhancement of capacity to deal with humanitarian issues. The Government of Japan, therefore, will continue to support such efforts.

It is essential to properly review the Central Emergency Response Fund in order to help it to respond to humanitarian crises more effectively. We need to do so in a more comprehensive and systematic manner, including by examining the challenges and problems the Fund faces. For example, what contribution does the Fund make towards reinforcing the existing process of providing humanitarian assistance, involving, as it does, instruments such as the Consolidated Appeal Process and flash appeals? We also need to clarify the criteria for resource allocation, especially in an underfunded emergency window.

One of the challenges the Fund faces, as clearly described in the report of the Secretary-General, is the improvement of the speed with which it makes disbursements, so that the Fund can become an effective mechanism for providing assistance in emergencies. Japan wishes to join in any constructive efforts to achieve that goal.

We would like to express our support for the cluster approach, one of the pillars of humanitarian reform. It is a useful method for strengthening response capacity, increasing the effectiveness of multilateral humanitarian assistance and improving coordination. Although there is much to be done, we are glad to hear from many in the field that the approach has worked, in the follow-up to the earthquake in Pakistan and in other humanitarian crises.

The cluster approach is also useful in addressing the issue of internally displaced persons, as long as there is no international organization with a clear mandate to deal with this problem. Here again, we would appreciate a comprehensive assessment of the effectiveness and challenges of the cluster approach to be followed. We need consultation and information exchange on the ground between all relevant humanitarian actors, on the one hand, and strong leadership to implement this approach effectively, on the other. This is also a reason why Japan supports OCHA's ongoing efforts to strengthen the role and function of humanitarian coordinators. We believe that decentralization of authority, to be achieved by giving humanitarian coordinators stronger mandates, should be explored in this context.

Disaster reduction is an essential pillar of sustainable development and is, therefore, one of the issues that is vitally important for the United Nations to address. Even in the short time that has passed since the World Conference on Disaster Reduction was held in Kobe in January 2005, massive disasters have struck in many places, including Pakistan, the Philippines and Java in Indonesia, demonstrating the urgent need to implement the Hyogo Framework for Action.

The new facility launched by the World Bank on disaster reduction will certainly facilitate implementation of the Hyogo Framework, and we therefore welcome it. We strongly believe that the Hyogo Framework will be even more fully implemented once components of International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (ISDR) become stronger. We support the clear recommendation in the recent report of the Secretary-General's High-Level Panel, entitled "Delivering as One", that the United Nations' efforts on risk reduction need to be urgently enhanced, through full implementation and funding of international agreements and other recent initiatives and the involvement of communities.

As a nation with extensive knowledge and technology relating to disaster reduction, Japan wishes to be actively involved in achieving a strengthened ISDR, and we intend to make contributions to the deliberations of its Programme Advisory Committee. Japan will share the experience, expertise and knowledge it has accumulated in Kobe, where there are many organizations specializing in disaster-related activities and working with countries in Asia and beyond.

We commend humanitarian personnel for carrying out their difficult responsibilities under often severe crisis conditions. We must do everything we can to ensure the safety of these individuals. We also wish to underline the importance of ensuring unhindered access to affected people for the purpose of providing them with assistance. In order to assist people in need, Japan, in conjunction with the rest of the international community, will continue to join actively in efforts to strengthen coordination of humanitarian and disaster relief assistance.

Mr. Chulkov (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): This year has been very important for the international humanitarian community. The international community has shown its resolve to

improve the global mechanism of humanitarian response and bring it to a qualitatively new level of operation. We are glad that this work, as can be seen from the report of the Secretary-General, yielded the desired results. In this context, we wish to point to the role of the Secretariat, in particular the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), headed by its leader, Mr. Egeland.

Through joint efforts, member countries succeeded in reinforcing our disaster response capacity. We have reinforced the mechanism of humanitarian coordination, first of all, in the field. In our view, the assignment of the relevant authority to the United Nations resident humanitarian coordinator to coordinate the activities of the United Nations humanitarian agencies in the field is consistent with the task of achieving a more adequate humanitarian response. However, we also believe that the United Nations country teams should maintain close partnership with host Governments, especially because Governments have the responsibility, first and foremost, to take care of their citizens, including those in need, and have the primary role in establishing priorities in humanitarian response strategies.

The so-called cluster approach is an important element of improving the mechanism of response in the field. We should apply it carefully, taking into account local specifics and circumstances without automatic extension to other countries. The Secretariat has to consider the fact that its mandate in this area, given to it by the Member States, is to fill the gaps rather than clusterization in all areas.

We closely follow the establishment of the United Nations multidimensional integrated peacekeeping operations with humanitarian components. We support the Secretariat in its effort to preserve and defend the humanitarian space.

The qualitative improvement of the international humanitarian response resulted also in the creation of the Central Emergency Response Fund. We share the positive assessment by the Secretary-General of the first months of its work. We are satisfied by the way the reporting on fund expenditures is organized, which ensures transparency in its operation. We are looking forward to an independent biennial report on its work.

We have taken note of the Fund Advisory Group's recommendations on potential Fund allocations to support disaster reduction activities. We are not convinced that this approach is right, especially taking into account the existence and operation of a separate United Nations Trust Fund for Disaster Relief Assistance.

The international humanitarian response mechanism cannot be regarded as static even after such large-scale improvements. Statistical data show an increase in the frequency and gravity of large-scale natural and man-made disasters in the world with ever-greater consequences. This means that we should continue our efforts to maintain this mechanism at the appropriate level.

We continue to assign the key role in these efforts to the United Nations and its Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). We believe that OCHA should continue to pay priority attention to the fundamental principles of the provision of humanitarian assistance — humanity, neutrality and impartiality, as well as the independence of humanitarian agencies. Moreover, none of these principles should prevail over others. On the contrary, only the comprehensive and consistent implementation of these principles in humanitarian activities can bring about, in our view, the best possible results in providing assistance to those in need.

At present, it is increasingly evident that we need to be able to forecast disaster emergencies and prepare in advance. We support the measures to strengthen the mechanisms of planning and preparedness for emergencies triggered by disasters. It is necessary to build up the national systems of early warning, damage assessment and disaster mitigation, as well as increase international cooperation in this field. We assign the key role in this area to the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction. We believe it is necessary to intensify international cooperation so as to achieve the objectives of the Strategy and the final documents of the World Conference on Disaster Reduction in Kobe.

In conclusion, to pursue a point that my colleague from Ukraine was making, this year is a significant one for the peoples of Russia, Belarus and Ukraine. Last April we marked the twentieth anniversary of the tragic accident at the Chernobyl nuclear power plant, which was the largest man-made catastrophe in terms of its scope, complexity and consequences. On 28 April 2006, the United Nations General Assembly held a Special Commemorative Meeting in observance of this tragic date. This significant event in the history of the

United Nations marked a new stage in the development of international cooperation on Chernobyl, in the strengthening of which the United Nations should continue to play a particularly catalytic and coordinating role. We express our deep gratitude to all Member States for their solidarity; we regard it as a token of successful cooperation in this area for the future.

Mr. Maurer (Switzerland) (*spoke in French*): Switzerland attaches great importance to the intergovernmental discussions and negotiations on the strengthening of the coordination of United Nations humanitarian aid in the framework of the General Assembly.

For several years now Switzerland has advocated greater complementarity between this work and that of the humanitarian segment of the Economic and Social Council substantive session. At this stage, we believe that positive results have been achieved, which is encouraging for the future efforts in this area. We invite Member States to pursue, with the support of the Secretariat, the discussions aimed at reallocating the humanitarian issues dealt with by the General Assembly.

Switzerland is pleased with the improvements to the emergency response capacity of the United Nations system and with the fact that increased attention is now being paid to international humanitarian coordination. For Switzerland, each key component of the international humanitarian system — the United Nations, the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) — contributes to the common goal of saving lives and of alleviating suffering when it has not been possible to prevent it. We call for greater cooperation between humanitarian actors in order to increase effectiveness.

At the same time we wish to stress that humanitarian action must be based on realistic assessments of the needs for protection and assistance of all the persons affected — without any distinction and in accordance with humanitarian principles — as well as on the known capacity of all the national and international actors on the ground. We would like to reiterate that the primary responsibility for protecting and assisting internally displaced persons lies with the Governments concerned, which can refer to the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement. The relevance of these principles was reaffirmed by the heads of State and Government at the 2005 World Summit.

Switzerland stresses the primacy of civil organizations in the implementation of humanitarian aid, in particular in zones affected by conflicts. We invite Member States to make use of the existing instruments governing civil-military cooperation in crisis situations. We thank the Norwegian Government for taking the initiative, in collaboration with the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), to call a high-level meeting on 27 November 2006 in Oslo, to advocate for the effective implementation of the 1994 Guidelines on the Use of Military and Civil Defence Assets in Disaster Relief, which have now been updated.

As the Secretary-General rightly underlines in his report, preparedness capacities for natural disasters must be strengthened, both at the community level in collaboration with all parties concerned and at the national, regional and international levels, in accordance with the Hyogo Framework for Action. Switzerland is pleased with the efforts initiated by the Secretariat, with the support of partner organizations of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee, to strengthen, for the long term, the humanitarian coordinator system, which is the cornerstone of increased United Nations effectiveness and credibility at the field level.

Lastly, with regard to the gender dimension in emergency situations, we are pleased to note the forthcoming publication of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee gender handbook.

Mr. Miller (United States of America): There has been much activity and much progress in the realm of humanitarian reform this year, in particular through the refinement and implementation of the cluster approach, the further strengthening of the humanitarian coordinator system and the establishment of the expanded Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF).

The United States supports the cluster approach, which strengthens United Nations leadership through the formal assignment of coordination roles for humanitarian activity. That approach has helped to address some critical and long-standing gaps in coordination. We would like to stress the importance of broad participation and inclusiveness in the cluster system. We hope that non-governmental organizations (NGOs), international organizations, donors and host

Governments will all be welcome at the coordination table. We hope that ongoing intergovernmental discussion can help clarify the value of the cluster approach, which can, if implemented thoughtfully, enhance humanitarian services by instituting both predictability and accountability.

Protracted civil conflicts continue to create some of the largest situations of forced displacement in our era. One of the most significant and long-standing gaps in humanitarian response concerns the protection of internally displaced persons (IDPs). The cluster lead initiative aims to address the United Nations role in that regard, most significantly by assigning an overall IDP protection role to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). The United States supports that new role.

Another important pillar of the reform effort involves the selection and training of humanitarian coordinators. This is a critical element for strengthening the United Nations humanitarian system, and it has received insufficient attention. We recognize that it is a complicated issue involving a range of United Nations agencies, but we encourage the Emergency Relief Coordinator to continue to work for substantial improvements in this area.

The United States also understands the critical need for the efficient deployment of humanitarian personnel in response to crises, and we therefore agree in principle with the recommendation to establish more effective standby arrangements. We look forward to more details regarding the proposed method to enhance standby capacities. We are willing to share our experience in this area with the United Nations system and with other Member States.

There is no doubt that the expanded CERF is an effective tool for rapid response to humanitarian emergencies, and that the Fund provides a valuable avenue for the participation of additional donors. We are less sure about CERF's value in addressing underfunded emergencies. We need clearer definitions and the development of criteria to govern disbursements in that area. An allocation system based on the percentages of funding received for each United Nations appeal is inadequate. Not all appeals fully reflect the range of humanitarian activity, and some are not limited to emergency response. While it may be interesting to make a comparison of needs across humanitarian crises, we must not neglect the range of complex issues that impact vulnerability.

The United States is also concerned about discussions that cite a need for greater equity of resources as a goal of humanitarian assistance. That contradicts the fundamental premise that humanitarian action is based on need. We support the strengthening and standardizing of methodologies to assess humanitarian needs, but we caution against attempting to compare needs and vulnerability across crises. It is widely accepted in the humanitarian community that it is not appropriate to establish universal standards of vulnerability. It is also important to clarify that standards of delivery, such as those established by the Sphere Project, are not necessarily linked to resource allocation. The cost of aid in one context cannot be compared to another without a complete analysis of a wide range of factors.

The capacity of the United Nations and other humanitarian actors on the ground to conduct sound analysis and to effectively deliver humanitarian assistance is critical to success. However, without full and unhindered access for humanitarian actors, even the most robust response efforts will fail to meet emergency needs. Deliberate attacks on humanitarian workers have become a significant impediment to life-saving aid in many crises. We must work to guarantee the safety and security of relief workers.

In conclusion, I want to reaffirm the strong support of the United States for the core humanitarian principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence. These provide a foundation for international humanitarian work, and must continue to guide our efforts, especially as we strive to address the range of challenges we face today.

Mr. Campbell (Australia): The international humanitarian community is increasingly confronted with complex and changing crises. In response we must work to increase the effectiveness of humanitarian assistance and to accurately measure its impact. There is a moral and operational imperative to maximize the impact of humanitarian assistance. We should be able to demonstrate that we are doing so.

Australia supports the central and unique role of the United Nations in providing leadership and coordination of international humanitarian action. We were pleased that the report of the Secretary-General's High-level Panel on United Nations System-wide

Coherence underlined the importance of the role of the United Nations in humanitarian action and gave greater impetus to the humanitarian reform agenda. The humanitarian reform agenda, led by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), has an integral role to play in improving humanitarian response capacity, coordination and financing. Australia supports those efforts and commends the progress in improving United Nations coordination and enhancing the impact of humanitarian assistance. But there is still work to be done to continue to improve effectiveness and to address key challenges associated with humanitarian action. I would like to highlight a few areas where Australia believes we must continue to focus our collective efforts.

The humanitarian coordinator system is a critical part of the reform agenda. We have joined others in calling for the humanitarian coordinator system to be made stronger, and we wish to acknowledge the changes and improvements that have been made. We encourage OCHA to continue to develop the system, including through the selection and training of humanitarian coordinators and resident coordinators. It is important that the cadre of people available for deployment be further developed and deepened; in doing this we encourage active efforts to improve the gender balance of the pool.

Steps to improve the response capacity of the United Nations system and of individual agencies in key sectors are also important. In that regard, we welcome the development of the cluster leadership approach and were pleased to contribute to the global cluster appeal. While there is still work to be done to develop the cluster approach, we have seen the positive impact it can have — for example, in the response to earthquakes in Pakistan and Yogyakarta. The cluster approach is also a useful mechanism to address major shortcomings in response capacity globally. We urge OCHA and others in the humanitarian community to continue to strengthen the cluster approach.

Financing is also an important pillar of the humanitarian reform agenda. The Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) has had a positive impact on humanitarian response. Australia provided $A10 million to CERF, and we are pleased with the results delivered so far. However, there is still work to be done to improve procedures and to strengthen comparative-needs assessment between underfunded emergencies. We encourage OCHA to continue to strengthen CERF and to broaden its donor base, including by attracting private donors and contributions from a wide range of Member States.

Australia strongly supports the efforts by OCHA to build partnerships with, and within, the broader humanitarian community. In our view, partnerships are now a fourth pillar of the humanitarian reform agenda. We believe the forum held in July to bring together all humanitarian actors was an important step. The agreements that arose from it were positive. We look forward to hearing more about how they are to be taken forward and about the impact that stronger partnerships will have on humanitarian preparedness and response. We would add that military and civilian police relationships are also important in humanitarian response, and efforts should be made to strengthen coordination with those actors.

Violence continues to be deliberately directed against civilian populations and aid workers in emergency situations. That will not be stopped without the full support of the United Nations and its Member States. In particular, it is of grave concern to Australia that gender-based violence continues to be a real and significant problem during, and in the aftermath of, humanitarian emergencies. We call on the United Nations to strengthen its resolve to combat gender-based violence. It is vital that we focus the necessary resources and efforts on preventing and prosecuting gender-based violence, alongside working to address the causes of such violence. We urge all Member States to ensure that their national laws and judicial and community mechanisms are adequate to prevent, address, promptly investigate and prosecute gender-based violence, and to support the victims of such acts.

Before I conclude, I would like to express Australia's appreciation to Under-Secretary-General Jan Egeland for the work he has done over the past three years at the helm of OCHA and as Emergency Relief Coordinator. While Mr. Egeland will no doubt be looking forward to new challenges, we believe he can reflect with pride on his achievements and on the impact he has had on bringing humanitarian assistance to those in need and on strengthening the system to respond. On behalf of the Australian Government, I would like to convey my sincere congratulations to Mr. Egeland for his outstanding contribution to the United Nations system and to international development. We wish him well for the future.

Finally, let me reiterate Australia's strong support for the current humanitarian reform agenda. The reforms are beginning to demonstrate their potential, and our challenge is to ensure that over the coming years that potential is realized. We must ensure that the momentum and progress achieved thus far are sustained, and we must look to other ways that we can continue to improve the impact of humanitarian assistance.

Mr. Mahjoub (Sudan) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like, on behalf of my delegation, to express my gratitude to the Secretary-General for his reports (A/61/79 and A/61/463) submitted under agenda item 69, entitled "Strengthening of the coordination of humanitarian and disaster relief assistance of the United Nations, including special economic assistance", and the reports (A/61/85, A/61/87 and A/61/314) submitted under sub-item 69 (a), entitled "Strengthening of the coordination of emergency humanitarian assistance of the United Nations".

As we debate this important item, we cannot fail to commend all those who work in the humanitarian field for their sacrifices in reaching those in need. My delegation highly appreciates the efforts made by the United Nations and its specialized agencies and by other organizations. We express our particular appreciation to the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). We also wish to express our gratitude for the contributions and relief assistance extended to the Sudan during emergencies and crises.

My delegation would like to share with the Assembly our country's experience in the area of humanitarian assistance — a pioneering experience that could benefit the international system and groups working in the humanitarian field and enhance their ability to address such situations in a way that ensures maximum efficiency and optimal benefits while adhering fully to the principles that must govern humanitarian efforts.

In addition to its excellent experience over the decades with donors of humanitarian assistance, my country continues to honour its international and regional obligations. The Sudan is host to one of the largest groups of refugees in Africa. With unconditional generosity, our people give all they can to alleviate the suffering of refugees, sharing our meagre resources with them and providing them with shelter, food and safe haven. My country has also contributed to alleviating the effects of earthquakes in various regions of countries near and far. In addition, we have contributed to easing the suffering of those affected by the tsunami in South-East Asia, as an act of solidarity with peoples who have the closest of ties to the Sudan.

Humanitarian assistance efforts must take into account the need for close and direct cooperation and coordination with Governments and national organizations. They must also take into consideration the sovereignty of States, dealing with them in a way that maintains the dignity of their peoples. The fact that a country has fallen victim to a humanitarian crisis and requires relief and assistance from the international community in no way means that its cultural specificities and national dignity can be infringed upon. In that regard, my delegation calls for more efficient coordination among national, regional and international agencies working in the field so that responsibilities and tasks can be shared in order to provide for better prepared and more timely responses. My delegation also calls for full commitment to the guiding principles for humanitarian activities, which were clearly established in General Assembly resolution 46/182 and reiterated in subsequent resolutions. There is a need to discuss ways of strengthening respect for, and implementation of, those principles.

A review of the Sudan's experience with humanitarian assistance reveals certain facts that the General Assembly must consider. In many situations, over 60 per cent of assistance resources have been allocated for administrative costs. That has robbed humanitarian efforts of credibility and placed those in need at the bottom of the list of priorities of humanitarian efforts. It is therefore natural that we urgently and seriously consider the best ways to reduce administrative costs and rectify the current situation. At the same time, national capacity-building and the participation in humanitarian relief efforts of national voluntary organizations must be given the necessary attention and resources to allow them to immediately address disasters. They are more familiar with the circumstances of the societies affected and are capable of playing a cost-effective role, saving important resources that could be directed towards those in need.

The focus of humanitarian operations on direct food assistance must be reevaluated, so as to avoid

destructive effects on the economy and on production capacities and local food sources. It can encourage farmers and producers to turn away from production, thereby expanding the cycle of poverty and creating unwise patterns of consumption, deepening crises and slowing the recovery process. In that connection, my delegation would like to cite a study conducted by concerned parties in the Sudan, which confirmed that over the past 10 years 80 per cent of food assistance has come from abroad. That pattern has a negative long- and medium-term effect on the productive capacities of affected countries. We therefore reiterate the importance of purchasing foodstuffs on local markets, assisting recovery and making up losses in gross domestic product resulting from halts in production in areas affected by disasters and crises.

Those who follow humanitarian assistance efforts in various parts of the world will note that such undertakings are governed by the wishes of donors rather than by the real needs of affected populations. The situation must be addressed quickly in order to ensure the effectiveness and benefits of humanitarian assistance.

Moreover, close coordination, transparency and accountability require cooperation, in a spirit of partnership, between donor and recipient countries. It is indeed necessary that in such a partnership donor countries provide recipient countries information about their financial contributions to humanitarian groups and organizations working in those States, enabling recipients to track expenditures and enhancing accountability vis-à-vis those in need and all parties concerned. Humanitarian relief operations and assistance must take place in an environment of complete transparency, and must not be used as a pretext to implement other agendas in the guise of humanitarianism. Otherwise, humanitarian efforts will be meaningless and serve to manufacture and deepen crises, thereby sapping the overall credibility of the United Nations.

In conclusion, my delegation would like to take this opportunity to reiterate its full readiness to cooperate unreservedly with the United Nations and all other parties concerned, with the full transparency and openness necessary for successful coordination and cooperation in the area of humanitarian assistance, with a view to providing unconditional assistance to those in need in an environment free from hidden agendas and complexity so as to achieve the goals of human solidarity reflected in the Charter and other United Nations commitments.

Mr. Liu Zhenmin (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): The Chinese delegation would like to express its appreciation to the Secretary-General for the reports he has submitted in connection with the agenda item under consideration. I wish to make the following remarks under that item.

Over the past year there have been frequent occurrences of various kinds of natural disasters and emergencies all over the world. Over 92,000 precious lives were lost, nearly 30 million people became homeless and over 100 million people lost their livelihoods. Furthermore, the infrastructure of affected countries was seriously damaged. All of that has caused enormous suffering and huge economic losses to the Governments and the peoples of affected countries. The frequent occurrence of natural disasters calls for increased humanitarian assistance from the international community and poses a great humanitarian relief challenge to the United Nations system.

As required by resolution 60/124, the Secretary-General launched the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) in March this year, with a view to scaling up resources so that the United Nations system can more effectively help affected countries to cope with various natural disasters and begin recovery and rehabilitation work in a timely manner. Thanks to the joint efforts of all parties, the Central Emergency Response Fund has raised $273 million since its establishment, and has provided timely and effective disaster relief assistance to victims of major disasters in response to emergencies in several crisis regions, thereby registering great progress on the way towards reaching the goals it has set for itself.

The Chinese Government has actively participated in and supported reform in the area of the humanitarian relief provided by the United Nations system. We have pledged $1 million to the Central Emergency Response Fund as a concrete effort to help alleviate the suffering and losses of the Governments and peoples of disaster-stricken countries. The Chinese delegation believes that the establishment of the Central Emergency Response Fund is a major achievement in the reform of United Nations humanitarian activities and will enhance the capability of the United Nations system to respond to the need for

humanitarian assistance and to provide necessary start-up funds for major emergency disaster relief operations.

That being said, the Fund's resources amount to only 5 per cent of the total sum that the United Nations plans to raise through the consolidated appeal mechanism. Thus, it can in no way replace the traditional role played by that mechanism. The Chinese delegation calls upon the international community, and developed countries in particular, to make greater contributions to the Central Emergency Response Fund so that it can reach its target of $500 million at an early date. We also hope that United Nations organizations and agencies involved in humanitarian assistance will continue to use the consolidated appeal mechanism and to explore various avenues so as to provide further relief resources for the economic recovery and rehabilitation of affected countries.

Given the frequent occurrence of natural disasters and emergency situations in recent years, an increasing number of organizations and agencies have participated in humanitarian assistance efforts at the international, national and non-governmental level. In addition, the coordinating role of the United Nations in the area of humanitarian assistance is receiving increasing attention from all sides. It is therefore necessary to further strengthen the leading role of the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), in order to enable it to play its coordinating role more effectively. The mandates and responsibilities of various organizations and agencies should be clearly defined, and work overlap reduced, so that recipient Governments can benefit to the maximum from international assistance in their post-disaster relief, recovery and rehabilitation endeavours.

At the national level, we welcome the establishment and improvement of the humanitarian coordinator system within the United Nations. Coordinators should receive necessary training and guidance so as to enhance their capacity to provide relief and on-the-ground coordination and, under the leadership of the Governments of affected countries, provide more technical support for relief activities.

The Governments of affected countries should play a leading role in all aspects of relief activities, as well as in planning for recovery and rehabilitation. Strengthening international and regional cooperation is an effective means for affected countries to cope with natural disasters and to enhance their capacity to reduce and prevent disasters. In providing humanitarian assistance to affected countries, the United Nations and the international community should always adhere to the guiding principles of humanity, neutrality and impartiality, make a full assessment of the severity of disasters and disaster relief capacities of affected countries and provide assistance based on the actual needs and priorities of those countries.

Furthermore, when relief assistance begins, consideration should be given to the transition to recovery and rehabilitation. In the process of project planning and implementation as well as in the allocation and use of resources, the wishes, autonomy and ownership of affected countries should be fully respected, and mutual communication between donors and affected countries should be strengthened so as to ensure the effectiveness of assistance.

The United Nations enjoys a clear advantage and possesses rich experience in disaster relief, disaster prevention and disaster reduction. In the future, it should continue to strengthen and develop partnerships with other international organizations, financial institutions and non-governmental organizations engaged in humanitarian relief work. The international community should give humanitarian assistance greater priority in terms of resources, mechanisms and technology and use sophisticated scientific and technological means and information to help disaster-prone countries and regions to establish early-warning systems, enhance their supply-stocking and rapid deployment capabilities as well as their ability to prevent and respond to natural disasters.

China is a disaster-prone developing country. Through years of study and practice, it has established a fairly comprehensive disaster-prevention and disaster-reduction system suitable to our national conditions. The Chinese Government attaches great importance to international cooperation in the humanitarian field and, in response to requests by Governments of affected countries and appeals by the international community, has actively participated in major international emergency relief operations. To the extent possible, it has provided some affected countries with timely humanitarian assistance, in cash and in kind, through both bilateral and multilateral channels, including food aid, emergency disaster relief and assistance in the settlement of refugees and in post-disaster reconstruction.

Last year, China successfully hosted the Asian Conference on Disaster Reduction and the China-Association of South-East Asian Nations seminar on a tsunami early warning system. In the aftermath of the powerful earthquake in South Asia, China provided relief assistance to Pakistan. This year, China actively participated in the relief operation after an earthquake hit Yogyakarta province in Indonesia. Those examples fully demonstrate the compassion, support and care of the Chinese Government for the Governments and the peoples of affected countries, as well as its firm commitment to international humanitarian cooperation. As a member of the developing world, the Chinese Government will continue, as always, to support the efforts of the United Nations and the international community in the areas of disaster relief, reduction and prevention. We are willing to exchange and share experiences and lessons with other countries and to carry out more wide-ranging international cooperation in the field of disaster management and emergency relief and assistance.

Mr. McNee (Canada): Over the course of the past year, international humanitarian action has brought hope and comfort to millions of people worldwide. United Nations agencies and other actors continue to make concerted efforts to ensure more effective, coordinated and timely humanitarian action in response to crises. In many respects, we can look back on the past year as one of important progress and positive change. Key elements of the humanitarian reform agenda are becoming a reality. But we cannot take that progress for granted. Our collective humanitarian-response capacity continues to be stretched by ongoing crises that affect the lives of millions of people.

Despite some positive developments, residual United Nations inter-agency rivalries persist, and cooperation with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and other partners is often strained. Conflicts such as those in Darfur, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, northern Uganda and Sri Lanka continue to remind us of the toll that violence takes on civilian populations. Earthquakes in Pakistan and Indonesia serve as potent and deadly reminders that natural disasters cannot be prevented, but that we can, and must, do better in terms of investing in disaster management and risk reduction. All Member States have an important stake in ensuring that the United Nations is successful in its efforts to strengthen the global humanitarian system. We have a collective responsibility to ensure that the positive momentum seen to date on that agenda is maintained over the long term.

In that respect, Canada continues to place importance on reinforcing the coordination of humanitarian action within the United Nations. Key issues related to enhancing response, capacity and the assessment of needs require our attention and commitment. I would like to outline a number of Canada's priorities in that regard.

First, we applaud United Nations efforts to introduce the cluster coordination system as a means of improving humanitarian response by promoting stronger inter-agency cooperation, including cooperation with other humanitarian organizations. As a collaborative mechanism, it establishes centres of accountability to ensure that needs are appropriately identified and that action is taken to address key gaps in response capacity. Nevertheless, we have noted a number of key areas where progress has been slow to come, specifically in the global protection and early recovery clusters.

We recognize that it is still early days in terms of evaluating the cluster approach. It will take time for the respective United Nations entities to build their capacity and to support humanitarian coordinators in that ensuring that more timely, predictable and effective humanitarian action is achieved. However, we expect cluster coordinators to exercise the leadership and cooperation required to overcome challenges in operationalizing the cluster approach. Moreover, it is vital that the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) work with cluster leaders to buttress their coordination capacity, to establish benchmarks against which States can measure progress and to monitor implementation.

Secondly, in order to ensure more effective humanitarian response we must strengthen our ability to assess and monitor humanitarian needs. The Good Humanitarian Donorship initiative recognizes the importance of allocating humanitarian funding in proportion to needs as a guiding principle. Yet, if we are to target funds where needs are greatest, it is essential that we can agree on how to identify those needs and how to best address them in a manner that is consistent across crises. Improving the evidence base required for decision-making must therefore become a

higher priority among United Nations entities and other humanitarian partners.

Clearly, such a development would have important implications for key initiatives such as the Central Emergency Response Fund. Canada has made a significant contribution to the Fund this year; it is, in our view, an important means of providing more timely, flexible and predictable funding in response to natural disasters and complex emergencies. That is at the heart of the Good Humanitarian Donorship initiative. But for the Fund to achieve its objectives, its allocations need to be guided by good evidence-based analysis, needs assessments and priority-setting by country teams under the leadership of humanitarian coordinators. OCHA should also work to establish a results framework for the Fund, in order to clearly demonstrate its impact on improving the equity and effectiveness of humanitarian assistance.

Thirdly, I wish to underscore the importance of strengthening the role and capacities of resident and humanitarian coordinators. High quality and experienced humanitarian coordinators and resident coordinators who can provide a comprehensive vision for the humanitarian presence in the field, while engaging relevant authorities when necessary, are essential. Without strong individuals playing these roles, greater individual agency capacity and access to resources will prove ineffective. Canada welcomes efforts by OCHA to broaden the pool of potential humanitarian coordinators to include individuals from other United Nations agencies and non-governmental organizations, and the strengthening of the capacity of humanitarian and resident coordinators through continuous training.

Fourthly, we must continue to have a strong cadre of able staff prepared to keep the protection of civilians at the forefront in their discussions with relevant authorities, including non-State actors where appropriate. In complex emergencies, flagrant violations of international humanitarian law are all too often the norm and not the exception. Rampant sexual and gender-based violence remains a reality in too many contexts.

The United Nations protection deployment capacity established by OCHA is a welcome and much needed common service. Protecting civilians remains fundamental to effective humanitarian action. The protection deployment capacity is helping to increase agency capacity to monitor, identify and develop more timely strategies to address violations of human rights and humanitarian law and to protect people. However, the protection deployment capacity is only meant to augment regular agency activities for protection and, therefore, we expect that relevant United Nations agencies will accelerate efforts to strengthen their internal capacities to address this critical need.

Fifthly, greater emphasis needs to be placed on how we can enhance civil-military cooperation, recognizing the value and expertise of civilian and military actors in specific contexts, and respecting that humanitarian action should be largely civilian led. In the context of a natural disaster response, Canada believes the United Nations must be more proactive in identifying gaps in civilian capacities that may best be filled by military and civilian defence assets. Through OCHA, the United Nations must provide Governments with better guidance on the standards that those offering such assets must meet, develop more robust standby arrangements to ensure effective and coordinated responses, and mitigate duplication with various regional entities developing parallel processes.

(*spoke in French*)

Finally, as we encourage more timely and effective humanitarian responses in crisis situations, our Governments must remain acutely aware that the safety of those who do this work is increasingly at risk. Deliberate attacks on United Nations and associated personnel persist, with deadly consequences. Between mid-July and the end of August of this year, 28 aid workers were killed while trying to help civilians in need. A recent study has highlighted that attacks against aid workers are increasingly politically motivated and that national humanitarian staff are more at risk than ever before.

There must not be impunity for those who target and attack aid workers. I urge those Member States who have yet to sign or ratify the 1994 Convention on the Safety and Security of United Nations and Associated Personnel to do so. Member States must investigate and prosecute the perpetrators of such acts whenever and wherever they occur.

At the same time, humanitarian aid agencies must improve their security management, training and resources, including for national staff. They must better collaborate with one another on security related issues

and include security in their programmes as a cost of doing business.

In conclusion, I wish to reiterate Canada's commitment to efforts aimed at strengthening the humanitarian system. Successful humanitarian action is an important component of the wider United Nations reform agenda, including proposed reforms to the international peace and security architecture. This also applies to efforts to enhance the United Nations human rights capacity and to effectively address the transition from relief to development, through mechanisms such as the Peacebuilding Commission. In this regard, we are pleased to see that the report of the High-level Panel on United Nations System-wide Coherence has been completed and look forward to considering its recommendations closely, including those in the humanitarian field.

The reality is that we cannot prevent every crisis. Consequently, when the need arises, we must be confident that we can respond effectively and quickly to populations in need.

In closing, we would like to pay tribute to Jan Egeland, who has played such a fundamental role in driving the humanitarian reform agenda forward. Canada looks forward to continuing to work closely with the Emergency Relief Coordinator, United Nations entities and humanitarian partners and Member States to further strengthen the humanitarian system. In doing so, it is important that through our collective efforts we can make real and lasting change to the lives of people affected by crisis. Our collective and sustained commitment and leadership is more critical than ever.

Prince Mishal Bin Abdullah Bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud (Saudi Arabia) (*spoke in Arabic*): I wish at the outset to thank His Excellency the Secretary-General for his report entitled "International cooperation on humanitarian assistance in the field of natural disasters, from relief to development" (A/61/314).

Humanitarian assistance to counter natural and man-made disasters is a noble and essential activity; it reflects international solidarity and the unity of mankind. Strengthening this humanitarian activity and increasing its effectiveness are an obligation and a challenge to the international community owing to the vast human and financial losses these catastrophes entail. In this context, we must benefit from the experience of the numerous States that have faced natural disasters, as well as from the information that exists on capacity that is available at the regional and international levels.

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has consistently called for strengthened understanding and close relations among peoples in order to highlight the great importance of international human solidarity if we are to create a world where well-being, stability and security prevail, free from threats or dangers. Saudi Arabia continues to be a generous country that has provided generous assistance out of human solidarity. It has also provided effective assistance and emergency aid in various parts of the world and has become the largest donor for the benefit of peoples and countries affected by disasters. It has thereby sent a message of love, amity, solidarity, support and cooperation to the world.

The total contribution of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in various areas of emergency response from 1975 to 2004 exceeds $4,986,000,000; this does not include our support for the reconstruction effort in Iraq, which is in excess of $1 billion. A further $430 million in assistance was provided to countries and peoples affected by the earthquakes and the tsunami in Asia, and the Saudi people gave a further $90 million in direct contributions. In addition, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has provided $2.5 billion to the brother country of Lebanon.

Saudi Arabia's humanitarian assistance has not been limited to bilateral or direct assistance. We have also participated in international humanitarian efforts through specialized programmes and agencies. We have supported regional and international development institutions by providing capital of more than $24 billion. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has also pledged $1 million to the Central Emergency Response Fund, in addition to $4 million from the Saudi Development Fund to initiatives to help persons affected by natural disasters under the auspices of the International Monetary Fund.

If we are to respond realistically and seriously to the frustration and despair of people suffering from hunger, poverty, disease, ignorance, underdevelopment and debt, we must mainstream the concepts of humanity, equality, justice and sustainable development in all areas — health, education, the economy and society — with a view to achieving

stability and enhancing international peace and security.

Thus, there is a need to establish a partnership based on genuine solidarity, to forge development acts between North and South, and urgently to increase official development assistance. We must also address the problem of the debt of poor and middle-income countries by increasing foreign direct investment and technology transfer to the largest possible number of developing countries and working seriously to liberalize international trade.

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has joined in international efforts aimed at ending poverty and hunger, by providing economic and financial assistance through its various national funds, through international and regional institutions, as well as through bilateral agreements with developing countries. Here, the Kingdom is guided by its deep belief in peaceful coexistence, human solidarity and constructive cooperation for the good of humanity as a whole.

The total amount provided by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia during this period, through bilateral and multilateral channels, in grants and development assistance under favourable terms exceeds $83.7 billion, which represents 4 per cent of our annual gross domestic product, the largest such percentage in the world. Eighty-seven developing countries on several continent have benefited from this assistance. This assistance is aimed at supporting the long-term economic and social development of these countries and helping them develop their infrastructure and the vital sectors of health, education, water and agriculture, for example by helping them dig wells and build dams. With regard to alleviating the debt burden of a number of countries, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has cancelled more than $6 billion owed by the neediest among developing countries.

We know that oil is an important strategic and economic commodity for developing countries and for consumer countries alike. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia therefore acts prudently and impartially to protect the interests of producer countries without overlooking the interests of the broader international community. It acts tirelessly to ensure the stability of oil prices in order to safeguard lasting economic growth worldwide.

In order to strengthen cooperation in this field, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, on instructions from the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, King Abdullah Bin Abdelaziz Al Saud, has founded the International Energy Forum, whose secretariat is hosted in Riyadh. The Forum is intended to discuss various energy topics and opportunities for cooperation and dialogue between consumer and producer countries and strengthen such cooperation to ensure the stability of oil markets and world economic growth for the well-being of all.

Optimal use of the world's enormous economic resources could bridge the huge gap between rich and poor countries, put an end to hunger and disease and support development in all its aspects. Similarly, finding just solutions to the various problems that weigh on international peace and security can strengthen the security and peace to which the peoples and notions of the world aspire.

Mr. Cherginets (Belarus) (*spoke in Russian*): Humanitarian operations have always been an important element of the activities of the United Nations, and the Organization is closely identified with them in countries and regions in need of international assistance. In recent decades, these operations have been at the forefront of efforts to help victims of humanitarian disasters.

Unfortunately, such crises are caused not only by natural disasters, as was in the case in South Asia following the tsunami or the earthquake in Pakistan; more frequently, the international community is also called upon to respond to acute humanitarian needs of people in countries suffering from armed conflict. Recent years have proven to be a serious test of the capacity of the United Nations to organize and coordinate international humanitarian assistance for needy countries and regions.

How does the Organization deal with this task? We feel that it is still too early to give it high marks here. The Secretariat and the specialized agencies take too much time in assessing country needs and in bureaucratic formalities that obstruct the tasks of humanitarian organizations. As a result, some States prefer to provide humanitarian assistance on a bilateral basis, without involving the United Nations machinery.

In this connection, we welcome and support the efforts of Mr. Jan Egeland, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief

Coordinator, to strengthen United Nations coordination mechanisms and the Organization's capacity to respond to humanitarian crises as they arise.

In December 2005, the Republic of Belarus was one of the sponsors of General Assembly resolution 60/124, establishing the Central Emergency Response Fund. We hope that, through the joint efforts of Member States, we will be able in the near future to attain the planned amount of $500 million for the Fund. This is an important undertaking that will enable the Organization to respond to the needs of people suffering from conflict and natural disasters.

There is an important trend on the part of United Nations specialized agencies and funds to work out a strategy for humanitarian activities. As a member of the Executive Board of UNICEF, Belarus supported a proposal in September 2006 for a three-fold increase in UNICEF's emergency programme, from $25 million to $75 million. We noted with concern UNICEF Board information that, in July, during the military action in southern Lebanon, the Central Emergency Response Fund was the sole source of funding for UNICEF's response and humanitarian assistance to Lebanese children. Our delegation supports the leadership of UNICEF, the United Nations Population Fund and other organizations in their desire to strengthen their potential to participate in humanitarian operations.

The Republic of Belarus seeks to be an active participant in international humanitarian operations, regardless of all the difficulties of its transitional period, which includes a large financial expenditure to clean up the man-made catastrophe of the Chernobyl nuclear power plant. Belarus was one of the first to respond to the misfortunes in the Indian Ocean area in 2004 and granted assistance, free of charge, to the affected States. Nor did we remain a bystander in the recent conflict in the Middle East; in the very heat of the war, Belarus took in children from affected States and provided heavy aircraft to carry significant assistance cargo.

We intend to develop our cooperation with the United Nations in the mitigation of man-made disasters. Currently, a bilateral draft agreement is being drawn up between Belarus and the United Nations on measures to speed up the entry and exit of transit cargo for emergency assistance, as well as staff needed for emergency procedures. This agreement will help simplify the movement of humanitarian cargo in Belarus and across the territory. We also feel that the conclusion of such an agreement, a new practice between Belarus and the United Nations, will constitute an effective contribution by our country to speeding up the delivery of international humanitarian assistance to people affected by disasters.

The twentieth anniversary of the Chernobyl disaster cannot be forgotten. We are grateful to the Governments of Japan, Switzerland, Italy, Germany, the United States and Ireland, and to the International Atomic Energy Agency, the Red Cross and other international organizations; regardless of the changed priorities of international cooperation for Chernobyl and the socio-economic recovery of the affected territory, they continue to devote attention to rendering humanitarian assistance to the victims of the disaster.

The provision of mobile medical laboratories for remote populated areas and support for national efforts in monitoring the state of health of the affected population are important to us even today, 20 years following the catastrophe. We are particularly grateful for the efforts of the many international non-governmental organizations that serve as catalysts for international assistance to overcome the dire legacy of Chernobyl, and we express the hope that work on humanitarian support for the affected population will be continued on the part of the international community.

Today's discussion eloquently illustrates how much still remains to be done by the United Nations and by the entire international community in the humanitarian area alone. We strongly regret the attempts by some large States to turn the General Assembly into a forum for political persecution and public punishment of States not to their liking, not believing in the strongly urged single universally applied model of development.

In terms of human rights, for example, we see such actions as displacing the strengths and resources of Governments from the real and essential problems of the people of our planet to stir up instead confrontation and mistrust. Those States pursue a goal that can easily be perceived as deflecting the attention of the international community from their own political criminal aggression with respect to independent States.

If all the resources set aside by a number of countries to support political opposition in Belarus and other States not to their liking — which is a gross

interference in the internal affairs of States — were directed instead towards United Nations humanitarian work, we would then be able to attain the planned level of $500 million for the Central Emergency Response Fund. It is high time that responsible politicians gave this some thought.

In conclusion, I would like to thank Secretary-General Kofi Annan for his decades of work for the world community and to congratulate the Secretary-General-designate, Mr. Ban Ki-moon, on his election to this high and very responsible position. We wish him every success in his endeavours on behalf of the peoples of the world.

Ms. Blum (Colombia) (*spoke in Spanish*): I wish to thank the Secretary-General for his report on strengthening of the coordination of emergency humanitarian assistance of the United Nations (A/61/85).

In Colombia, humanitarian assistance to vulnerable populations is one of the State's main priorities. The Presidential Agency for Social Action and International Cooperation coordinates a comprehensive programme of action for the displaced population. The focus of the programme centres on the dignity of individuals and restoring the rights of displaced persons. Their social and economic reintegration into their places of origin or places of relocation is also a high priority of the Government.

The programme is funded by national resources and international cooperation resources. Its components include emergency assistance, which has covered 82 per cent of affected persons. The return of families has been carried out with the support of the State and of various agencies, taking into account the humanitarian principles of voluntary return and security. Creating conditions for the social and economic stabilization of affected persons through measures such as credits for productive projects and technical training, as well as supplementary support in the areas of health, education and housing, are basic components of the national policy in this area.

Several years ago, we incorporated into our law the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement. Their adoption is among the recommendations contained in the Secretary-General's report.

With regard to the phenomenon of displacement, Colombia believes it is essential that analyses be made on the basis of objective, reliable and verifiable data. That is why we are curious about the figure, cited in the Secretary-General's report, relating to internally displaced persons in my country. The report indicates neither the methodology followed to arrive at that estimate nor the statistical sources used. According to official figures, the number of registered displaced persons is 1,875,000 for the period 1998-2006. In Colombia, despite the complexity of this phenomenon, there has been a progressive and substantial reduction in the annual number of new displacement cases. That reflects the positive results of the Government's democratic security policy and social development policy. The number of newly displaced persons added to the national registry decreased from 425,000 in 2002 to 169,000 in 2005, and so far in 2006 it has fallen to 90,000.

My delegation wishes to emphasize that it is important that humanitarian assistance be guided by the principles of neutrality, impartiality and humanity, that it correspond to the needs of countries and therefore that it supplement Governments' efforts to improve their response capacity and their institutional infrastructure in this area. That is the only way to deal effectively with emergency situations and to guarantee sustainability when it comes to restoring the social conditions of those suffering from the effects of humanitarian emergencies.

For those reasons, among others, my delegation believes that the thematic group approach, or cluster approach, is inappropriate as a model for humanitarian assistance. The main objective of the support provided by United Nations agencies must be strengthening national capacities to deal with emergencies. In the cluster approach, the realities and specific conditions in countries requiring humanitarian assistance are not recognized. In Colombia, for example, not all of the agencies participating in this area belong to the United Nations; some of them are not even part of the United Nations system.

An approach such as the one proposed would weaken the role of Governments, because they could be replaced by agencies as coordination entities. It is Governments and States that should coordinate humanitarian assistance, with the participation of agencies — not the other way around. Strengthening the role of the United Nations must not come at the expense of the role of Governments in this sensitive area. Therefore, any implementation of a model or

programme in a country must have that country's consent. Likewise, any humanitarian reform initiative must be based on an intergovernmental mandate, which in turn must always respect the sovereignty and territorial integrity of States.

I wish to take this opportunity to pay a special tribute to the World Food Programme for its cooperation with the Government of Colombia in assisting displaced persons. Outside the United Nations system, we wish to commend the work of the International Organization for Migration and the International Committee of the Red Cross. The example set by the efforts of those entities should be the rule, not the exception, in the area of humanitarian assistance.

Accordingly, the financing of humanitarian assistance should be channelled towards the agencies and institutions that work best with States, have the best performance record and therefore contribute most effectively to the strengthening of national institutions and their implementation capacity. Thus, resources could be allocated to the entities whose work is most effective and efficient.

The Secretary-General's report refers to next steps, in which engagement in humanitarian assistance would be broadened. My delegation wishes to emphasize that it is important that the terms of such a broadening be negotiated with the State in question. We recognize and are grateful for the support of the entities working in this area.

At the same time, we agree with the report's recommendation that national leadership be strengthened with a view to taking the required actions. That would help to prevent the politicization of humanitarian assistance and ensure full compliance with its guiding principles. Otherwise, the system's response capacity would be weakened and could suffer a loss of legitimacy and credibility

Establishing operative frameworks that take countries' specific situations into account would be positive for the system. Short-term successes must not cause us to lose the perspective of sustainability and permanent capacity for dealing effectively with emergency situations and providing timely humanitarian assistance.

Mr. Abdul Azeez (Sri Lanka): My delegation thanks the Secretary-General for his informative report (A/61/85) presented to the General Assembly under this agenda item. We also take this opportunity to express our special thanks to President Clinton, United Nations Special Envoy for Tsunami Recovery, for his commitment and leadership in coordinating the ongoing international efforts, and to all the stakeholders that supported us in the tsunami reconstruction and rehabilitation efforts in Sri Lanka. We also welcome the recent initiative launched by President Clinton — Mangroves for the Future — and supported by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources, known also as the World Conservation Union, the United Nations Environment Programme and the United Nations Development Programme.

The socio-economic impact of the tsunami was of great consequence as it compounded previously existing vulnerabilities. Due to the timely response of the Government, local communities, local non-governmental organizations and the private sector, bolstered by the United Nations and other international and intergovernmental organizations, the country recorded no additional deaths owing to tsunami-related diseases or lack of delayed medical treatment.

With international support, the Government carried out immediate repairs of basic infrastructure, such as major pipelines and water resources, roads, bridges, electricity and telephone lines. National and foreign military personnel helped in the rescue operation, the identification and burial of the dead and debris clearance. Nearly 600 schools and places of worship provided emergency shelter and food aid was provided to 910,000 people. A compensation scheme for victims was also put in place.

The past decade has witnessed a significant increase in human and economic losses caused by natural disasters. The frequency and severity of these extreme events can be traced to several factors, the main one being climate change. Increased vulnerability throughout the world, caused by a number of development practices, also remains a significant factor. The effects of climate change and the increasing deterioration of the environment, particularly deforestation and the reduction of both the quantity and quality of water, represent a major challenge in the near future.

Vulnerability to disasters also depends on human behaviour. At issue is the degree to which a socio-

economic system is either susceptible or resilient to the impact of natural hazards. Such susceptibility or resilience is determined by a number of factors such as awareness of the hazards, the condition of human settlements and infrastructure, public policy and administration and the wealth of a given society and its organizational abilities in all fields of disaster and risk management. A socio-economic system's strength also depends largely on development practices that do not factor in any possible susceptibility to natural hazards. Risk reduction refers to activities taken to decrease both vulnerable conditions and their causes, especially those related to drought, floods and landslides.

The Government of Sri Lanka has projected that it would take at least three to five years to complete the task of rehabilitation and reconstruction and to fully restore the services and livelihoods affected by the tsunami. This effort will cost approximately $2.2 billion. The international community has committed $2.1 billion, out of which roughly $600 million has been disbursed. In addition, debt relief or moratorium, and balance of payments support, have also been received. Based on a clear assessment of the experience so far, the Government is in the process of identifying remaining gaps and taking corrective measures to ensure the speediest recovery.

Sri Lanka has undertaken an objective assessment of post-tsunami relief, recovery and reconstruction intervention, and has projected the way forward. This exercise was carried out in conjunction with many development partners, resulting in a joint report entitled "Post-tsunami recovery and reconstruction". Equity has been made a primary guiding principle in the tsunami recovery programme, which takes into account both overall poverty alleviation objectives and the special needs of conflict-affected areas.

Given the number of actors involved and the size of the reconstruction needs that have arisen, coordination, monitoring and evaluation have posed a huge challenge. A clear lesson learned from this complex process has been the need for increased communication with the affected communities on vital concerns such as gender mainstreaming, and with national and international partners and agencies on avoiding duplication of efforts.

The delegation of Sri Lanka is pleased to note that the issue of better utilization of resources through improved coordination on the ground is very rightly included as an integral component of the recovery programme. Disaster management has also become a national priority with the creation of a new ministry. A national early warning and protection system has been developed and will be coordinated by the country's meteorological department. Sri Lanka has also identified the importance of building local capacity for timely interventions in the event of natural disasters.

We reckon that the United Nations and international efforts should support but cannot substitute for the efforts by both the Government and local civil society. The imperative of fully utilizing local human resources and local procurement as a means to contribute to national economic development and poverty alleviation should be acknowledged and promoted.

In the recovery and reconstruction process, equity concerns deserve particular attention. It is the shared responsibility of the Government and development stakeholders to ensure that no one is left behind. In this regard, we hope that all pledges will be converted into commitments, thus enabling the Government, assisted by other relevant actors, to coordinate and accelerate the reconstruction and development of areas affected by disasters, and to ensure sustainable recovery of properties, livelihoods, industries and infrastructure.

Sri Lanka is making all efforts to ensure rapid recovery of affected areas and to foster long-term social and economic development. Sri Lanka is resolved to achieve its 21st century growth plan and Millennium Development Goals through empowerment of local communities and strategic coordination of existing Government and non-government stakeholders.

By mid-2006, 56,000 units of transitional shelter were completed by development partners to accommodate the displaced families living in emergency shelters. Of this number, 6,105 units have been decommissioned and at least 5,224 families have moved into permanent shelters. Through a combination of the donor-driven, owner-driven, private sector and group housing programmes, 55,483 houses have already been completed and 40,589 units are under construction. The authors of the tsunami housing policy paper have estimated the number of total housing units required to be approximately 120,000. The recovery process is making positive progress and we are hopeful that we will realize the targets set.

In conclusion, allow me to observe that the tsunami tragedy highlighted to all of us the value of collective action and international solidarity. The

Government and the people of Sri Lanka thank once again all those who have helped us and continue to help us in our recovery programme.

Programme of work

The Acting President: I should like to inform members that there has been a request by the sponsors of the draft resolution contained in document A/61/L.20 that action on the draft resolution be postponed.

The General Assembly will therefore take up sub-item (r) of agenda item 108 at a later date.

The meeting rose at 1.05 p.m.